

EXTRACT OF THE CABINET MINUTES FROM THE MEETING HELD ON 11 OCTOBER 2017

206. Planning for the Right Homes in the Right Places

The Assistant Director Policy and Corporate submitted a report a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

Councillor Willetts attended and with the consent of the Chairman addressed the Cabinet. The consultation paper proposed a standardised method for calculating housing need. Most residents of Colchester would be disturbed by the 19% rise in Colchester's housing allocation that had resulted. The impact of the formula proposed in the consultation paper was that those areas that already experienced rapid growth would receive more housing. Colchester had already seen a period of rapid growth in housing numbers without a commensurate increase in infrastructure. The administration was not using New Homes Bonus to support infrastructure and there were issues with the delivery of health services and transport infrastructure. The response to the consultation should stress that Colchester had delivered its fair share of housing growth, and that the target of 920 houses per annum should remain. Colchester should be seen as an exception and that there should be no more house building until infrastructure was delivered.

Councillor Smith, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Strategy, explained that the provision of health services was a matter for the Government and transport infrastructure was for Essex County Council. The Council's ability to deliver infrastructure and housing was constrained by government policies. An argument that Colchester was a special case was likely to be unsuccessful.

Councillor Scott attended and with the consent of the Chairman addressed the Cabinet. The proposals were not right for the country as a whole as they would exacerbate the north- south divide, nor were they right for Colchester. The Local Plan had been carefully crafted and the imposition of further housing would create chaos with the Local Plan. Local control of where houses were built would be lost. Confirmation was also sought as when Wivenhoe would be able to sign off its Neighbourhood Plan. In addition, planning enforcement needed to be more robust and better resourced.

Councillor Smith acknowledged Councillor Scott's concerns and that it was possible under the proposals that each parished area may have a housing target imposed on it by central government. Councillor Cory, Portfolio Holder for Resources, explained that the examination of the Wivenhoe Neighbourhood Plan should take place in the next four months, and before the examination of the Local Plan.

Councillor Bourne, Portfolio Holder for Housing and Communities, explained that the Local Plan process was robust and the imposition an extra 190 homes per annum would cause great difficulties. To cease house building until further infrastructure was in place ignored the needs of those on housing waiting list. Further housing needed to be built but it needed to be of the appropriate tenure. The comments of the District Council Network were supported. The government should give councils the fiscal freedom to build council houses. Not only would this provide additional housing for

those in need, but would also reduce the amount paid in housing benefit to private landlords.

Councillor Smith also endorsed the comments of the District Council Network. The Council could build 50 council houses in Colchester if allowed to do so. The increase in the proposed housing numbers from the allocation in the Local Plan was unsustainable, particularly without investment in infrastructure. The imposition of arbitrary targets made it difficult for local authorities to plan sensibly. The formula for calculating housing need proposed in the consultation paper was based on the purchase price of properties, but took no account of rental values.

Councillor T. Young, Portfolio Holder for Business and Culture, indicated that the Council would respond robustly to the consultation. The Local Plan had been submitted this week and if it was declared sound the extra housing allocations set out in the paper would not be imposed. This showed the benefit of ensuring decisions on the Local Plan were not delayed. The proposals did not reflect government initiatives to shift some of the economic strain from the south of England to the north. A full response to all the questions would be sent based on the views of the Cabinet and stressing that decisions on housing and infrastructure were best taken at a local level.

RESOLVED that:-

(a) A response to the “Planning for the Right Homes in the Right Places” consultation paper be sent to the Department of Communities and Local Government, based on the views expressed by Cabinet.

(b) The draft response be subject to change following discussion at the Local Plan Committee on 6 November and authority be delegated to the Portfolio Holder for Business and Culture to agree the response prior to submission to the Department of Communities and Local Government.

REASONS

The consultation provides an opportunity for the Council to comment on emerging national policy. There are significant implications for the Council if implemented, not least the uplift in housing need targets.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

Not to respond to the consultation.